

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 DAMASC 00046 061459Z

43

ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /026 W

----- 070237

P 061417Z JAN 75

FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2310

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 0046

EXDIS

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, US, XF

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT FORD'S INTERVIEW WITH HELEN THOMAS

REF: A. DAMASCUS 0015; B. STATE 001474

1. MET WITH PRESIDENT'S POLITICAL ADVISOR, ADIB DAOUDI, JANUARY 4 AND FURNISHED COPY OF PRESIDENT'S REMARKS TO HELEN THOMAS CONTAINED PARA 2 STATE REFTEL. TOLD DAOUDI THAT AFTER READING THOMAS INTERVIEW I WAS PUZZLED WHY HE INTERPRETED PRESIDENT'S COMMENTS AS A HARDENING OF OUR ATTITUDE VIS-A-VIS THE GENEVA CONFERENCE.

2. DAOUDI REPLIED THAT HE AND OTHERS IN PRESIDENT ASAD'S ENTOURAGE (AT NO POINT DID HE CLAIM TO BE SPEAKING DIRECTLY FOR ASAD) FOUND PRESIDENT FORD'S OMISSION OF ANY REFERENCE TO GENEVA MOST DISTURBING. READ AGAINST BACKGROUND OF DECEMBER'S VLADIVOSTOK COMMUNIQUE WHICH MENTIONED GENEVA, PRESIDENT FORD'S OMISSION OF SUCH REFERENCE SIGNALLED OUR TOTAL ABANDONMENT OF ANY MEANS OF PROGRESS OTHER THAN US STEP-BY-STEP APPROACH. PRESIDENT HAD ALL BUT SAID USG CONSIDERED ANY ARAB EFFORT AT PROGRESS, SUCH AS QUADRIPARTITE CONFERENCE, AS WASTE OF TIME. FACT THAT THE PRESIDENT ALSO MADE NO REFERENCE WHATSOEVER TO THE PALESTINIANS SUPPORTED THIS SYRIAN INTERPRETATION. FINALLY, HE SAID THAT PRESIDENT'S PREDICTION OF THE "HIGH LIKELIHOOD OF WAR UNLESS THERE IS MOVEMENT ON A STEP-BY-STEP BASIS" WAS INTERPRETED IN CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 DAMASC 00046 061459Z

DAMASCUS AS AMERICA'S THREATENING THE ARABS "DO IT OUR

WAY, OR ELSE."

3. SUGGESTED TO DAOUDI HE SHOULD BE MORE SENSITIVE TO THE CONTEXT OF THE FORD INTERVIEW. IF PRESIDENT DID NOT REFER SPECIFICALLY TO THE GENEVA CONFERENCE OR PALESTINIAN RIGHTS, FACT WAS HE HAD BEEN ASKED BY THOMAS TO ADDRESS HIMSELF SPECIFICALLY TO ANOTHER COLUMNIST'S REPORT AND HE HAD DONE JUST THAT. INTERVIEWER THOMAS DURING HER INTERVIEW HAD ASKED ONLY TWO QUESTIONS ON THE MIDDLE EAST AND PRESIDENT DEALT SUCCINCTLY WITH BOTH.

4. AT SAME TIME, IN CONTINUED, WE HAD NEVER MINCED WORDS WITH THE SYRIANS RE GENEVA: WE BELIEVED A STEP-BY-STEP APPROACH TO THE MID EAST PROBLEM WAS THE ONLY FEASIBLE FORMULA FOR SUCCESS. WE HAD NEVER AGREED WITH THOSE SYRIANS WHO ARGUED THAT IMMEDIATE CONVENING OF THE GENEVA CONFERENCE WAS PREFERABLE. WE HAVE CONSISTENTLY AND PUBLICLY MAINTAINED THAT GENEVA MUST BE PRECEDED BY CAREFUL PREPARATION LEST IT DEGENERATE INTO A BITTER RHETORICAL EXCHANGE WHICH WOULD ONLY FREEZE NEGOTIATING POSSIBILITIES.

5. SAID I WAS CONFIDENT THIS REMAINED THE USG POSITION, ONE WHICH HE, HIMSELF, HAD HEARD US PROPOUND MORE THAN ONCE. TOLD DAOUDI, HOWEVER, I WOULD ASK FOR INSTRUCTIONS ABOUT MY COMMENTS AND RETURN TO HIM WITHIN A FEW DAYS. DAOUDI SAID HE WOULD APPRECIATE THIS SINCE HE WAS PREPATING A REPORT TO ASAD ANALYZING THE THOMAS INTERVIEW ALONG WITH OTHER RECENT INDICATIONS OF US MIDDLE EAST POLICY.

6. DAOUDI THEN ASKED WHAT I COULD TELL HIM ABOUT OUR PLANS FOR ALLON'S VISIT. REPLIED THAT FONMIN ALLON HAD ALREADY MADE ONE TRIP TO WASHINGTON AND WAS EXPECTED TO RETURN TO THE STATES O/A JANUARY 10 FOR FURTHER MEETINGS. STATED THAT I HAD NO DETAILS ON RECENT EXCHANGES BETWEEN THE SECRETARY AND ALLON BUT FACT OF ISRAELI FONMIN'S PLANNED RETURN, WHICH HAD BEEN ANNOUNCED DURING HIS DECEMBER VISIT, WAS EVIDENCE THAT WE CONTINUED DETERMINED TO PLAY A POSITIVE ROLE IN THE AREA. CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 DAMASC 00046 061459Z

WE SHARED CONVICTION OF SYRIAN LEADERSHIP THAT THE PRESENT IMPASSE COULD NOT BE ALLOWED TO CONTINUE; SITUATION WAS DANGEROUS AND UNSTABLE.

7. COMMENT: DAOUDI DID NOT PRESS FURTHER AND SEEMED GENERALLY SATISFIED WITH FOREGOING. HE IS MORE AWARE OF U.S. PEACE MAKING EFFORTS THAN HIS FELLOW AMBASSADORS INSTALLED NEXT DOOR AT THE FOREIGN MINISTRY AND HAS

EMERGED OVER PAST FOUR MONTHS AS THE SOLE SYRIAN CAREER DIPLOMAT WITH EASY ACCESS TO PRESIDENT ASAD. I CANNOT YET COMMENT ON EXTENT OF HIS INFLUENCE OVER ASAD BUT CONSIDER DAOUDI A DISCREET, THOUGHTFUL OBSERVER WORTH CULTIVATING IN THE PRESIDENCY.

8. ACTION REQUESTED: INSTRUCTIONS CONFIRMING VALIDITY OF MY REMARKS PARA 3-6 OR SUCH MODIFICATIONS AND ADDITIONS I COULD PROVIDE DAOUDI IN OUR NEXT MEETING, WHICH I HOPE TO HAVE ON JANUARY 8 OR 9 FOLLOWING HIS RETURN FROM ASAD-FRANGIEH SUMMIT IN LEBANON.

MURPHY

CONFIDENTIAL

NNN

Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: GOVERNMENT REACTIONS, PRESS CONFERENCES, FOREIGN POLICY POSITION, PEACE TALKS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 06 JAN 1975
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: SmithRJ
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975DAMASC00046
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750005-0106
From: DAMASCUS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750176/aaaacpbl.tel
Line Count: 127
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION SS
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Reference: 75 DAMASCUS 0015, 75 STATE 001474
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: SmithRJ
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 18 JUN 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <18 JUN 2003 by KelleyW0>; APPROVED <30 OCT 2003 by SmithRJ>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: PRESIDENT FORD'S INTERVIEW WITH HELEN THOMAS
TAGS: PFOR, US, XF, (FORD, GERALD R), (THOMAS, HELEN)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006